
MERCHANTVILLE REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Committee Meeting #7
October 12, 2015 6PM
Merchantville Borough Hall

Attendees:

Mayor Ted Brennan
Ryan Middleton
Bill Lammey
Michael McLoone
Denise Brouse
Mara Wuebker
Matt Simberg

Handouts: Excerpt from Zoning Ordinance (Central Business District), Draft Permitted Uses, conditional Uses, Parking Standards, Design Standards, Building and Design Guidelines Excerpt from 2004 Redevelopment Plan

1. GUEST – POTENTIAL USER IN REDEVELOPMENT AREA

Matt Simberg, Director of the local Montessori school located at High Place Church at 113 N. Centre Street, spoke to the committee about the potential for locating his school in the Redevelopment Area. He currently has 33 students, but expects to continue to grow. The Montessori program includes kids between 18 mos- 15 years old. In the long term, he would like to open up the region's first Montessori high school in Philadelphia. For now, his focus is on finding the right space for the toddler and primary education children with the potential for a satellite location elsewhere. He anticipates needing about 8,000 square feet of classroom space for 200-300 students or so. The Montessori program has a strong focus on the environment – so they would need some outdoor space, as well, for gardening, animal husbandry, etc.

A committee member thinks that he may need more than that if looking to serve the upper end of that scale - - perhaps closer to 30,000 sf. There was a discussion about the potential for locating in the former PNC Bank building and adding on to that space, if needed. Bill or Mara will send him floor plans of the building. The group looked at the various concepts that have been developed and suggested constructing a new building along Chestnut, or on Park Avenue, closer to the Park/Chestnut intersection. Committee members discussed if on E. Park Avenue, would like to see the space wrapped at least partially on the street side in retail with the school using some of first floors and upper floors.

The committee discussed whether this would be a desirable use in the Redevelopment Area. On the one hand, the school would bring families from surrounding towns into Merchantville, but on the other hand, the school desires a significant amount of first floor space that would usurp retail space, which would reduce the desired level of street level activity in the downtown. There is

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only less than 2 acres of land overall and we want to have a strong retail and unique civic space component. Everyone agreed that the school on first floor would be ok for PNC Bank building because it is a unique situation.

2. REVIEW REVISED CONCEPTS

Mara worked on a new concept in order to address the comments from Council – particularly with regard to the piazza opening up to the bike path, the inclusion of a splash pad, as well as maintaining a significant amount of parking on the site, and incorporation of some infill on Centre Street.



3. PROPOSED REDEVELOPMENT PLAN CHANGES:

1. Permitted Uses – the group went over the current list of permitted uses in the Zoning Ordinance. Currently, the uses are very general and limited. On the one hand, we want to eliminate any unnecessary hurdles for users who want to locate in the downtown (like have to go to the Zoning Board), but we also need to make sure that we don't encourage unwanted uses in the downtown. Mara provided some suggested changes and the group discussed and edited the uses. We discussed residential as a conditional use only along Chestnut. No residential on first floor on Centre and Park. The group reviewed proposed bulk standards for twins and

townhouses and made suggested changes. Denise will provide Mara with updated ordinance. There have been some recent changes.

2. Parking Standards – Parking standards may want to be more flexible than currently have because uses are more fluid- there is turnover of uses in downtowns – the uses may change more frequently than would be typical in a suburban town. Haddonfield has two set standards – one for residential and one for non-residential. They have 1.5 per residential unit and 3/1,000 sq feet for commercial uses. We may want to do something similar. It's simple to apply and does not require users to have to continually go to zoning board for unnecessary variances – want to be more business-friendly.

For the residential standards, the Residential Site Improvement Standards are the required parking standards across the state for residential uses. However, in redevelopment areas, towns have the ability to seek a special area deviation. Also, there is a provision that states when housing is included in mixed-use development, a shared parking approach shall be permitted and also allows on-street parking to be counted. Lambertville breaks down their residential parking spaces based on number of bedrooms. The group liked that idea and made some edits to what was proposed. The group will look at the non-residential parking standards at the next meeting.

3. Design Regulations - There are design guidelines in the 2004 Redevelopment Plan. The underlying assumption was that a parking structure would be built, which was the driving force for some of the design guidelines, such as building orientation, etc. It did not contemplate that there could be a piazza or buildings that face Chestnut Avenue so this needs to be amended. Next meeting we will go into this further.

4. UPDATES (If any)

1. Verizon and/or Grace Episcopal Church Parking Lots – contact back from maternity leave so hope to hear back on this
2. Environmental Contamination – need to talk to Marc Selover
3. Demolition/Acquisition – Borough has ability to demolish house built in a day – still dealing with asbestos related demolition issues
4. Circulation – the park ave/chestnut intersection is being considered as one of the County's 3 proposals for a roundabout pilot program – the DOT grant would cover cost of design and construction.

5. NEXT MEETING

Mara will continue to draft Language for Redevelopment Plan Amendment. Committee should review handouts. Mara will be focusing on COAH plan so there will be a little pause in redevelopment work.